DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 925 RC 019 717

AUTHOR Reinhold, Amy Jo
TITLE Working with Rural Communities in Nepal: Some Principles of Non-Formal Education Intervention. Action Research in Family and Early Childhood. Monograph No. 1.
INSTITUTION Save the Children, Westport, CT.
SPONS AGENCY United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris (France). Div. of Unesco Information Services.
REPORT NO ED-93/WS/29
PUB DATE Sep 93
NOTE 29p.
AVAILABLE FROM Information/Documentation Services, The Young Child and the Family Environment Project, UNESCO, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Adult Basic Education; *Community Development; Community Education; Females; Foreign Countries; *Literacy Education; *Nonschool Educational Programs; *Rural Education; Rural Women; Sex Role; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS *Empowerment; *Nepal

ABSTRACT

This monograph describes Save The Children's Non-Formal Education (NFE) Program implemented in rural Nepal. Since the formal education of females is not a cultural priority, NFE targets women and girls. Currently, 90-95 percent of participants are female, including adult women and out-of-school girls. Enhancing and increasing literacy is the primary goal of NFE, a community-based program that couples literacy with community development. Program features include materials that are relevant to women's daily lives, and the organization of women's groups for collective action. Such groups have undertaken economic development activities; devised a system of home-based rotating child care; empowered local women economically, socially, and politically; and begun activities focused on the needs of children. Program implementation has demonstrated several principles of nonformal education intervention: (1) literacy curriculum relevant to learners' lives energizes the process of learning to read; (2) program sustainability is directly connected to community initiative and program ownership; (3) effectively reaching isolated rural areas depends on local program management, training, and monitoring; (4) an integrated approach addresses community needs more effectively and holistically; (5) raising awareness and meeting raised demands should be organizational responsibilities; and (6) child care issues must be addressed. Contains 15 references. (MNL)

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Action Research in Family and Early Childhood

Monograph No. 1

Working with Rural Communities in Nepal: Some Principles of Non-formal Education Intervention

Amy Jo Reinhold

Education Unit, Save the Children, USA

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Working with Rural Communities in Nepal: Some Principles of Non-Formal Education Intervention

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U N E S C O

YCF Action Research in Family and Early Childhood
September 1993

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Additional copies of this monograph can be obtained from:

Information/Documentation Services,
The Young Child and the Family Environment Project,
UNESCO, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

Printed in 1993 in UNESCO's workshop.

Document No ED-93/WS/29

Foreword

UNESCO and Early Child Development

Early childhood care and education is now viewed by scientific and educational research as the first and essential stage of the basic education process. Recent world conferences testify to a growing appreciation of the crucial importance of the child's earliest years, and of the need to support families and communities in their role as the child's most influential educator.

Improving children's health and nutrition is a first duty, but increasingly, in a situation where twelve out of thirteen of the world's children survive until the age of one, governments and civil society are turning their attention to the psycho-social and cognitive development of children. There is ample evidence[1] to show that healthy children who have experienced good early learning programmes are much more likely than other children to remain in primary school and achieve good results. In addition, countries that succeed in mobilizing local government, municipalities, communities and voluntary organizations in the care and education of very young children have been able to decentralise and innovate in their educational systems and, at the same time, make an important contribution toward population information and the education of women.

UNESCO joins with its sister agencies of the United Nations, in particular UNICEF and WHO, in assisting governments:

- to forge links at national level between the primary education system and early child development programming;
- to undertake sub-sectoral studies of the situation of young children and families, and to formulate national or regional programmes in early childhood care and education;
- to identify and support first-class universities and institutes which will research national needs and train high-level personnel to plan and animate national or regional policies;
- to support model early childhood and family development projects that stress the education of women;
- to promote legislation on behalf of children and families, and in particular, the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In addition, UNESCO in keeping with its educational, scientific and cultural mandate:

- encourages research leading to practical action in favour of young children and families;
- acts as a networking and clearing centre for information and briefings on early childhood;
- seeks to prepare children for schools and schools for children by encouraging and promoting respect for the young child's natural, learning process;
- collaborates in artistic, intellectual and cultural events promoting reflection on childhood and family issues.

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1. Myers R. *The Twelve Who Survive* London, Routledge/UNESCO 1992

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Acronyms Used

BASE	Bold Action for Social Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
NFE	Non-formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ORS	Oral Rehydration
SC	Save the Children
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WD	Women's Development

Executive Summary

Save the Children has twelve years of programmatic experience in integrated literacy for community development in Nepal. SC's approach to NFE has been to energize the process of becoming literate with useful daily information relevant to the needy communities of Gorkha and Siraha Districts.

The Non-Formal Education (NFE) program has a majority of female participants, ranging from 90 to 95%, and thus has been a key access point for organizing and working with otherwise isolated rural women. Its success has been the basis for a network of women's groups which continue production and other activities to the benefit of themselves, their families and their communities. Indeed, it has become the center of a community development approach that addresses issues of health, education, sustainable agriculture and natural resource management, and economic opportunities.

Now the program has spawned a variety of activities focussing more specifically on the needs of children and has formed a vital program within "Strong Beginnings," Save the Children's international early childhood development initiative. The ongoing programmatic progression described below builds upon the strengths of these years of experience and the key lessons learned therein.

Thus far the program has demonstrated several principles of nonformal education intervention.

- First, literacy curriculum relevant to the lives of the learners energizes the process of learning to read.
- Second, community initiative and program ownership must be established from the start to ensure impact and sustainability.
- Third, local program management, training and monitoring is essential for effectively reaching isolated rural areas.
- Fourth, an integrated approach addresses community needs more effectively and holistically.
- Fifth, organizational capacity should entail both raising awareness and meeting raised demands.
- Finally, expectations and abilities to address issues of child care must be taken into consideration when working to and empowering women.

These six lessons have been learned in working over the long term with community groups. Both the successes and the failures of this and partner organizations inform both new directions in the original communities and expansion into new areas in terms of geography and content. Thus, an action research approach continues to improve the original work as well as enhance the successes of new work both in more isolated areas and in new issue areas such as early childhood development and AIDS education.

Working with Rural Communities in Nepal: Some Principles of Non-Formal Education Intervention

Introduction

Organizational background

Save the Children (SC) is a non-profit, non-political, non-religious voluntary organization which has worked in community development in 50 countries around the world for 62 years. SC opened its office in Nepal in 1981 and began working in rural villages of Gorkha District by supporting projects in health, education, income generation, and sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

Program context

Nepal lies at the heart of Asia, landlocked between India and China. Featuring some of the world's highest and most majestic peaks, its northern Himalayan regions give way to the centrally located Middle Hills and finally to the lower plains of the tarai to the south. In comparative terms, Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 115 out of 120 in the 1989 World Development Report. A conservative estimate by the World Bank in 1991 put between 7 and 8 million of Nepal's 19 million people below the poverty line, the level required to support a minimum daily calorie intake (about US$100 per capita). They are living in "absolute poverty."

Average income is approximated as 3 340 Nepalese Rupees per capita, or about US$130 annually, with income distribution relatively even in the predominantly rural economy. The great majority of Nepalese are engaged in agriculture on their own or rented land and the family farm produces 80% of average household income (Seeds, 1991).

Gorkha District is a largely isolated rural area situated in the Middle Hills west of Kathmandu. Here, as in much of the country, Nepalese life consists of hard, unrelenting work. The average number of hours that Nepalese of all age groups spend working per day is as follows:

Hours work per day in the rural Nepal hills

Adults	
Male	7.9
Female	10.5
Children 10-14	
Male	3.8
Female	6.8
Children 6-9	
Male	1.9
Female	3.7

Source: *Nepal: A World Bank Country Study*, World Bank, 1991.

The work defined above includes both conventional and subsistence economic activities as well as domestic work. Women spend much more time than men on subsistence activities and domestic work and as a consequence, their work burden exceeds that of adult men by about 25%.

This gender pattern is established early in life. Girls from the early years have a work burden about double that of boys in the same age groups. Girls work more than boys in all age groups and their work burden increases with age. Not surprisingly then, girls have conflicting priorities which result in fewer opportunities to attend school than their male counterparts, and higher drop out rates when they do.

The educational situation

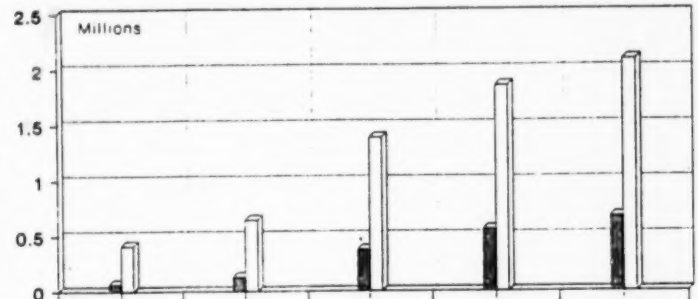
Standards and statistics

The last four decades has seen rapid growth in Nepal's education sector with the number of primary schools increasing from 321 in 1951, to 15 834 in 1990 and the number of students increased from 8 590 to 2.5 million.

The present formal education system requires between 9 and 12 years for the completion of the primary education stage. Unfortunately, this is a time span during which many families cannot do without the efforts of their children, and especially their girls, in making domestic and economic ends meet.

And as a consequence of their early and enduring workload, girls spend less than 60% of the time that boys spend in education and reading (World Bank, 1991). Thus, while there have recently been extraordinary gains and growth in the education system, its strength and its expanse in recent years, a great gender discrepancy persists as illustrated in the table below.

Number of girls at the primary level, 1971-1988



	1971	1976	1981	1986	1988
Girls	0.064	0.129	0.374	0.559	0.674
Total	0.411	0.644	1.388	1.858	2.092

Girls Total

Source: *Meeting Basic Educational Needs in Nepal*, MOEC, 1990.

Inhibitions to women's advancement

There are several principal reasons for young girls' attendance or absence from school. First, traditional views hold that girls' education is not necessary and not a rewarding "investment" for the family. A girl, once married, will live with and work to the benefit of her husband's family. Thus, many families simply opt not to send their girls to school seeing other uses of her time and energy as more beneficial to the whole.

If there are younger siblings in the family, the older girls often assume child care responsibilities from an early age. This leads to their irregular attendance and they often drop out of school altogether. Many young girls participate in income-earning activities. Thus they are limited by time constraints and investment priorities, as it becomes more important for them to earn than to learn.

Finally, segregation from men as well as early marriage which is common to several Nepalese districts also act to restrict the woman's chances of attending and/or completing school. All of these factors together work to reinforce the perceived "uselessness" of girls' education as an investment.

A women's group involved in SC's literacy classes in Bichueri affirms that work constrained their opportunities to study from a very early age. They explain that while they "knew the need to study, daily work took up all their time." They had to take care of smaller brothers and sisters while their mothers and fathers were in the field. They wanted to go to school, but couldn't because they "had to look after both buffaloes and home."

Girls who are denied schooling are not only deprived of literacy and education, but also of the valuable opportunity of interacting with and learning from peers and cooperating in peer groups.

There is now a national policy in place which favors girls' education and provides for special attention to increasing girls' access to school and working around the various obstacles to their advancement cited above.

Literacy and gender

The female literacy rate in Nepal is 13.2% (UNESCO, 1991) and almost 2 out of every 3 girls do not attend school due to a mix of economic and cultural factors like those outlined above. The following table illustrates through a further breakdown and elaboration upon the time use figures already presented the amount of time that various age groups in the rural Nepal hills spend on education and reading activities by gender.

Education and reading activities in the rural Nepal hills (hours per day)

Adults	
Male	.84
Female	.15
Children 10-14	
Male	3.52
Female	1.44
Children 6-9	
Male	3.22
Female	1.55

Source: *Nepal: A World Bank Country Study*, World Bank, 1991.

Children's and especially girls' absence and irregular attendance in school has been the cause of great concern in Nepal and has ignited a national program to impact the obstacles to greater participation and provide opportunities for adult learning.

National literacy program

World Education, with a small grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development, began a pilot project that eventually became the Government of Nepal's national literacy program. The program evolved gradually over 12 years (1977-89) and was molded in response to local conditions and the needs of learners, facilitators, government officials, and private development organizations. Gradually, a strategy for linking literacy training to development emerged.

Through this partnership, the Ministry of Education and World Education produced Naya Goreto, or "New Steps". This set of literacy materials combines content relevant to the learners' lives with an approach that encourages the use of critical and analytical skills. Adapted from Paulo Freire's approach to literacy methods in Brazil, the combination of relevance and critical discussions has proven both a popular and effective approach to basic literacy.

At national scale, however, this literacy system and approach has had various management and monitoring difficulties. Specifically, it has proven unable to reach large segments of the illiterate adult and particularly female populations of rural and isolated areas.

Its operational objectives are termed largely as target numbers of centers, classes, facilitators and students. This leads to a situation in which some classes have 60 participants and others have few who attend, but many who are enrolled. Thus, in general, the program focus does not pay close attention to whether or not the participants are literate "at the end of the day." The quotas may be met, but it can remain unclear that the learners learned.

In general, non-formal education is not as great a priority for the Nepalese government as formal education is. There is not enough money for adequate supervision and the government tends to focus upon materials distribution (including books, lighting, lamps, salary and blackboards). A centralized curriculum has been instituted in spite of strong local cultural and language differences that exist in a diverse population of which only 58.4% speak Nepali.

Program responsibility is often given to school headmasters. While this is convenient, it often leaves both the headmasters and the literacy class facilitators unsupervised. Thus classes open and close as they please. In addition, the facilitator training is short and occurs on only one occasion previous to class commencement.

In terms of management and planning, the government has limited manpower and yet the number of classes multiplies year to year. This occurs without equally increased attention to supervision, adequate training of facilitators or even materials delivery. The Department of Education gives short notice of the number of classes, making it hard to get facilitators. This then means calling an "emergency meeting of school headmasters" at which each is called upon to offer, "there could be X literacy classes in my area." This opens the system up to political influence, as local politicians will try to maximize the numbers and the positive association with education provision for political gains.

Thus, in terms of building upon these efforts, SC has learned the importance of curriculum relevance and local management, supervision and training from the Government of Nepal and World Education.

The young child and the family environment

Family in Nepal

As previously mentioned, the woman belongs to the home of her husband and moves there after marriage. Approximately 60.2% of girls between 15 and 19 years are married and it is estimated that 40% of all women are married before they reach 16 years. 16 is the legal age of marriage in Nepal, and yet almost a quarter of Nepalese districts report a mean marriage age below that figure (UNICEF, 1991).

These factors affect the long term impact of community development programming much as they affect the families themselves. "Investment" for the larger group is lost when women who participate in community programs before marriage move away from the groups in which they have become active members and agents of change.

The absent male

A substantial proportion (30-50%) of males from these hills of Nepal temporarily migrate to India to work as watchmen, or to the border areas to work in construction, coal depots, and forestry. "Temporary," in that they go for at least six months, and on an average stay for two years. In many villages of Gorkha the men are enlisted in foreign armies or are away working in the urban areas.

Role of girl children in the home

According to a recent UNICEF survey, by the time girls are 5 or 6 years old, they begin to participate in domestic work. They cook, clean, fetch water, fuel and fodder, tend animals, wash clothes, and manage and care for their younger siblings.

In terms of child care, a case study conducted in 1991 shows that while newborn infants receive a good deal of attention, once a child learns how to crawl, he/she is left to explore a very unhealthy environment (Seeds, 1991). Once the child can walk, he/she is often left with an older sibling, usually a girl of 5 or older. Beyond a lack of parental attention and stimulation and several issues of sanitation, this "system" sets up a learning situation in which a child's major source of information is another child only a few years his/her senior.

Generational roles in child care

The women involved in SC's production groups in Bichueri tell that while they are at work in the fields, they leave food for the children in case they get hungry and the grandparents and older children take care of the youngest children. When the older children are in school, they say, the grandparents are in charge. If there aren't any grandparents, then the older children won't go to school, or else the husband or wife must stay home.

The women think that missing school is a problem and say that "they don't want to make darkness for their children," so they should go to school and be responsible for child care only when they're off on Saturday. Unfortunately, this is not a common opinion or one that is always easy to act upon in the context of isolation and extreme poverty. As seen in the figures quoted above, young girls spend much time in domestic work, which includes child care.

ECD support systems in Nepal

Preschool education is limited to the children of the urban elite. UNICEF has recommended that a system of preschool education centers (with age appropriate curricula) be attached to all primary schools. This would both achieve psycho-social benefits for the young girls and boys, and liberate older sisters from child care responsibilities and allow them to attend school. Due to a lack of funding priority, these recommendations have not yet been put into practice on a national scale.

SC's approach to early childhood programming in this context of economic need has been built not upon the existing national bureaucratic structure, but upon community organization around education and production activities. In the long term, this attention to local resources and capacities enhances the likelihood of sustainable positive changes in the community. Above all, the cost of the approach being developed is within the communities' ability to maintain.

Save the Children's Non-Formal Education (NFE) Program

Program description

SC's work in non-formal education has been centered in Gorkha District which is located in the Middle Hills of Nepal northwest of Kathmandu and with elevations between 2000 and 8000 feet. It is populated by several castes: the dominant and better educated Brahmin/Chhetri Hindu castes, the Newars who migrated from the Kathmandu valley, various lower status occupational castes, and mixed tribal communities of Gurung, Magar and Baramu residing mostly on the northern ranges of the district.

Before SC began its literacy program in 1981, its support to education was "traditional", consisting of school construction and materials supply. The Ministry of Education and Culture was primarily responsible for implementing the national literacy program at that time. Thus, the extent of SC's early NFE activities was to organize one or two classes while continuing to focus upon addressing other community- defined development priorities.

These "pilots," raised substantial community interest. As this interest begat community organization, literacy became an effective means of community mobilization in Gorkha District. Community participation and organization is enlisted by insisting that each group interested in forming a class pay for books, registration and tuition (subsidized), construct a shelter or school and select a facilitator from within the community. Meeting these criteria creates participant ownership of the program and is essential to its success. In contrast, the national program is "provided" and free and has experienced low community and facilitator commitment.

The program also features regular supervision, regular meetings and training for community-chosen literacy facilitators in three phases during six months. Local offices make supervision much easier than central management from Kathmandu and sectorial staff placed in each ilaka. An ilaka is an area of land; seven to eleven ilakas form each district in Nepal. This placement of staff and support more locally also makes effective and ongoing needs assessment possible.

An additional benefit to approaching community development via literacy is that the large majority of participants is women. Thus, literacy is an effective path for assisting women in group activities. SC made the program more relevant to the daily lives of the women by adapting the literacy course content to address key issues and especially economic needs in their lives in expanding it into a second year and beyond. Motivation is high among the women for this simultaneous approach to learning reading and group organization for production.

The "litteracy" course covers peanut and goat farming, smokeless stove construction and forest conservation and other key practical sucjects via the texts and class discussions. Tus, the literacy skills are interwoven with the women's and communities' attention to, and attention span for, improving various aspects of their daily lives. The high level of interest and motivation is evident in the dedication that the women show in attending night classes away from their homes as described below.

Visiting a literacy class

On an August night at 9 p.m., more than twenty women of Bhusal Guan village sat under a pointed rectangular roof propped up on bamboo stalks. Together they read and repeated the words in their primers, one woman leading and the others following along with both their voices and their fingers. For six months of two consecutive years, they meet six days a week under the direction of their facilitator, a youngish woman who has completed the 9th grade.

The age range among them is great. There are young girls and grandmothers, but the majority are young women and several have their young children with them. The facilitator goes first as the reader and then calls upon others. The excitement of learning is in their expressions.

They pursue the national literacy curriculum with some key additions during the first session of six months and then follow SC's advanced literacy curriculum during the second session. These sessions are held during the agricultural off-season in two successive years. This particular group is an untouchable caste that began late in the past off-season and thus they are still meeting in August, even though it is among the busiest times of the planting season. Their presence broadcasts their dedication and pride.

In the villages of Deurali in Gorkha District, as in Bhusal Guan, the community heard of the literacy classes and those members who were interested joined together to discuss the idea. "Hoping to learn many things," they applied for the class. They "hoped to be able to make a brighter future and to be able to send letters" and were very happy when the start of classes was confirmed.

They chose a facilitator from among those qualified in their community to whom SC provided ongoing training. Twenty community members, mostly women, started in that first ward and they explain now, that this class "gave them their first opportunity to learn."

The NFE program has grown extensively since the first pilot communities in 1981. In 1989, it was expanded to achieve coverage in four of the seven ilakas of Gorkha District. This expansion has increased the number of community members benefiting from 4 500 to 110 000.

In addition, literacy activities were initiated in Ilakas 4 and 5 of Siraha District, a district in the tarai, or low lying plains of Nepal. This area has a total beneficiary population of 104 000, bringing the total number of NFE program beneficiaries in these two districts to 214 000.

These "beneficiary populations" of Gorkha and Siraha are calculated as including community members benefiting both directly and indirectly from this program.

Those directly involved in the NFE program over the past decade are as follows:

SC NFE Program participation

Year	Classes	Participants
83-84	26	702
84-85	38	784
85-86	45	905
86-87	47	982
87-88	39	776
88-89	30	518
89-90	106	1988
90-91	229	5337
91-92	358	9067
Total	918	21059

In addition to the basic and advanced classes for adults, SC has supported a class for out of school children aimed at enabling children who have dropped out of the formal schooling system or have had limited access to such schooling for various reasons to (re)enter once basic skills have been mastered. This program is particularly significant in that it provides young girls with a second chance at schooling and with a class schedule that makes a more appropriate fit with her other daily activities.

Program for out of school children

This story was told by the older members of the group in Bichueri. The young girl smiled shyly with pride, looking down at her dress while the group members explained her successes. The atmosphere the women created as they spoke of her was proud and fulfilled: they radiated a sense of accomplishment and hope.

Purna Nepali is a young girl who started primary school and attended through class three. At that point, however, she was out of school so much taking care of her younger brothers and sisters and doing work in the home that she failed the exam to complete the third grade. She joined the literacy course, studying at night with a group of community women and other children who, like her, were unable to attend school.

After she finished the two years' classes, she rejoined the school at class three. Her brothers and sisters are no longer small babies and she is freer. She finished class three last spring and was first in her class.

The large majority of adult NFE participants are women. The following are program enrollment rates for 1991-1992. The breakdown of this participant pool by gender illustrates the extent to which this program reaches rural women.

1991-1992 NFE Enrollment

Area	Class	Participants
Gorkha 1	39	1144
Gorkha 4	66	1747
Gorkha 6	34	985
Gorkha 7	100	2444
Siraha	119	2747
Total	358	9067

1991-1992 NFE Women's Participation

Area	% Female
Gorkha, Ilaka 1	89.4
Gorkha, Ilaka 4	91.4
Gorkha, Ilaka 6	65.1
Gorkha, Ilaka 7	90.4
Siraha, Ilaka 4,5	96.0

The discrepancy seen in Ilaka 6, where the percentage of women participants dips noticeably to 65.1%, is due to the utter isolation of the area which makes illiteracy rates and the demand for non-formal education opportunities high among men as well.

Partnership, materials and future NFE directions

SC has developed a close working relationship with partners in literacy in Nepal. The literacy materials produced for use in the second year and a post-literacy journal are used by 12 or 13 other organizations, mostly NGOs, implementing literacy programs in Nepal. In addition, SC has also begun training trainers from BASE (Bold Action for Social Education) a local NGO in Dang, a district to the southwest of Gorkha. This group is expected to support approximately 500 classes in 1993.

The use of literacy skills beyond the advanced year is supported by the publication and circulation of a journal for the "neo-literates" of all NGO literacy projects. This journal encourages neo-literates to submit articles for each issue and includes a pen pal section which invites participants to send their pictures and addresses and begin writing to each other. Future support to post-literacy activities may also include the establishment of a network of village reading centers in which each village would invest in various books and reading materials.

Another project intended to strengthen the NFE program and increase support to the formal education system will encourage literacy use while building up the link between parent and school. This is envisioned as using materials that will encourage parent-teacher communication, such as a notebook in which the teacher writes about the students and the parents respond therein. A similar approach to enhancing parent-child interaction will also be approached through post-literacy materials.

The impact of regional differences in language and culture on literacy programming has been of great debate in many countries and locations. This is especially true in Nepal as only 58.4% of the population speak Nepali. NGOs working in literacy have pursued this issue in various discussions and have supported its close study in three parts of the country. For its

part, SC has taken action in supporting post-literacy materials development in local languages where the communities are primary users of another dialect. In addition, the trainings being conducted in Dang focus upon the development of local language materials for neo-literates.

SC has established itself as a forerunner in the design and implementation of literacy and integrated non-formal education programs in Nepal. Developing, publishing and disseminating materials relevant to the adults' daily lives, SC impacts learning and community development in the districts in which it works directly, in the areas in which other NGOs work and at the national level.

Relevant curriculum has daily impact in women's lives

The importance of relevant materials to program success is evident by the self-described impact that it has had on the women in Gorkha District. Speaking with various groups of women who are or have been involved in this NFE program reveals the extent to which their opportunities have been expanded by meeting in groups to read, write, interact and organize. Ram Maya Ale of Bichueri tells:

> Before study, we couldn't read or write and we had to spend all our time in daily work and home work. We used to be shy to speak with people, now we can speak freely. We didn't know anything about outside the village. Visiting another village was confusing - which bus, when it would arrive at the destination - now we can read which bus goes where and can read the sign 'Kathmandu'. This is a good opportunity.

Her fellow group members and women from other areas agree and expand upon her statement explaining how the group learning has affected their lives. They can read and write letters to and from their husbands. They have learned to sign their names and thus don't face the embarrassment of using a thumbprint.

They read newspapers and learn about the outside world and proudly share the information with their illiterate parents. Now they know symptoms and treatment of fever and diahorrea, preparation of ORS and they know that they should send their children to school.

Those living close to a rubber factory in the district can now fill out applications for jobs previously inaccessible to them. A young group leader named Sita Maya Ale tells:

> I feel a vast change in myself. I used to spend all of my time with brothers and sisters in daily work and at home. Now, after I've completed the literacy classes, I can learn much more. Before, I had to ask another person to write a letter to my brother and parents. Now, I can do it myself. I can do group work and I write official letters for this work. I can read official letters that come too. When SC sends letters to call us, I can read it and talk and speak. I can attend meetings and be an active member of the community.

Likewise, the group leader in the village of Garadani expresses the difficulty of surmising the many benefits and changes that she and her group have experienced via the literacy and related group activities.

> We learned <u>everything</u>. It's so much that it's hard to explain. Before we were in darkness and didn't know good from bad, we didn't know the important things we know now. Now we realize what we need to do for ourselves and why: as with the community plantation and the conservation of this system as a water source for our children's future and how that is affected by sanitation.

By reading the lessons and discussing and applying the ideas, they have made improvements in their daily lives that make sense to them and they are eager to explain this to others.

From health information to issues of environmental conservation, the integrated curriculum content as well as the achievement of literacy has a significant impact on the adult learners, their families and community.

A study of the impact of these program pilots carried out in 1989 for USAID found that women participating in the literacy classes knew the causes of and preventative measures for diarrhea, preparation and correct use of oral rehydration therapy, and more about family planning and birth spacing than non-participating women. In addition, they fully immunized their children more frequently. Beyond these changes in health behaviors directly related to curriculum content, the following positive behavior changes were noted among literacy class participants:

- Expressions of power are much increased; villagers who attend the classes are more frank, do not feel so shy in communicating with strangers and outsiders and are also more polite than the other villagers;
- Class participants are easier to motivate for various community development activities, such as family planning, kitchen garden improvement, pit latrine, building, etc.;
- Cooperation among villagers for community development activities is increasing in the areas where adult literacy centers were opened;
- The number of participants who smoke has decreased;
- Parents who participate are sending more of their school-aged children to schools;
- The number of girls attending school is increasing in the villages where there are adult literacy centers.

In terms of impact upon illiteracy itself, the baseline percentage of literate population in Gorkha's Ilaka 1 at the time of expansion in 1989 was: 41.87% and by 1992 it was 54.32%. While the causal relationship between this increase and SC's programs must be established through further study, the ancillary effects of the program content mentioned above are clear indicators that the integrated approach to literacy used in this district is a strong model for successful program implementation both on a national and an international scale.

Obstacles to women's participation

The women in Bichueri are at different stages of literacy participation. Their leader, a single woman, has completed the full course. Some attended classes for 3 or 4 months, but didn't finish. Bishnu Maya was in this situation and did not complete the literacy classes because her child was small and sick. Now she would like to have the chance to learn to read again. Many who had young children at the time the literacy class was started now have them in school and are free to study.

One woman in Garadani told the following:

> When the women in the community called her to come she said, "I have lots of work and study isn't useful for us." Now I realize that the literacy classes are very important. The participants can read and write and I have become jealous. If I have the time, I can be ready to participate and read. I realize I missed a big opportunity. In several cases, the women participated for a period of time and did learn the importance of group work in the classes, becoming members of a production and savings group.

Married women participants tell that they've experienced problems in attending classes because their in-laws are illiterate. In such a case, the in-laws don't want her to study because they think she'll learn many things and begin to lead the family. They feel threatened and think they must stop her from going to study.

One woman started going to literacy classes and her in-laws and their son too asked who would do the housework? If it wasn't done, she couldn't go. She would leave the small children at home, but the husband said to take them with her. Her father and mother-in-law said this too. So she had to take them with her. It was too difficult and she couldn't complete the classes. Even husbands who are supportive want to sleep freely after a day's work and the

children cry. When the small kids disturb them they become angry and demand that the women take them to the classes.

Other daughters-in-law also expressed that their low status within the family meant a larger relative work load in the household and left them less time for learning, especially formal schooling, as they are too busy. "It's better at night for just two hours. Then we can learn as much as we hope. School takes all day and doesn't allow for daily work." Night classes meet their educational needs while allowing them to meet their other commitments.

Many women who have finished the course express interest in studying again. As for those who haven't completed the course, they must organize a class that meets the criteria: a minimum of 20 students, a facilitator, a "shelter" and fees for books. The only exception to these requirements are in the poorest of poor communities where smaller groups and terms more appropriate to their means may be possible.

Collective action

Organizing women for development

The literacy classes serve as a strong motivator to women's organization, an element further strengthened by the curriculum. The organization of women's groups around various production activities in development programs happened primarily via the NFE program and its expanded curricula. In this sense, program impact has been substantial as over 100 active women's production groups have emerged in Gorkha alone.

The women's groups are formed from literacy classes. The curriculum discusses what they can do to address their needs. Thus, as they learn to read, they gain useful practical knowledge of pig raising and kitchen gardening, banana, fish, potato, and ginger farming and establishing community plantations. As with a lesson on an improved smokeless cooking stove, the information includes what it is, its advantages, and how to make it, use it and clean it.

Beyond the practical, contextually relevant information, the literacy training for groups includes information on and discussion around the benefits of group work in the community, as well as issues of working with government and NGO support, etc. All community training also includes the explicit discussion of SC activities as ultimately benefiting the child and this is very motivating in the training.

Throughout this learning, the women contribute their tuition fees to establish a group savings fund. To be "recognized", groups must have 10 to 20 women members and display fundraising and management capability by raising 1 000 Nepalese Rupees. In addition, they should be in close proximity for easy group communication and must have carried out activities included in the literacy content on their own. Such activity criteria or prerequisites for group members include knowledge of ORS and family planning, smokeless stoves and latrines. Action upon these and other relevant practical information included in the curriculum content of the literacy courses shows both mobilization and commitment on the part of the women.

Program progression

The formation and recognition of many women's groups achieved through the curriculum content altered SC's overall program goal as well as its scope. What began as a pilot project in literacy has become an integrated women's development project including aspects of health, education, economic development and agriculture and natural resource management. Now the classes are seen as stepping stones to more all-encompassing objectives of social and personal transformation.

From the start, the women learn about the associated the activities and support available to them from contact with neighboring villages and relatives. From the first organizing discussions, they know that participation and group work doesn't have to end as a literacy/numeracy class. The women go on field trips during the class to see other classes' projects and activities and are already quite motivated as they are more responsible for meeting family needs.

As the women of Bichueri tell it, "before we started we were in a dark place and didn't know anything about group importance." They joined the literacy class and they discovered the importance of group work and what is necessary to work together. This integration of approaches and goals serves to further reinforce program impact.

Importance of group work for rural women

Once formed, the women's groups both expand upon the activities they learned about in the literacy courses, and undertake other income-generating activities. They establish a group savings scheme and an emergency fund to allow group members to afford treatment in the case of sickness. At a monthly meeting for group decision making on money and management problems the groups consider opportunities for both group and individual loans to be made from their fund.

According to the NFE staff, "what came out of the literacy system were scores of women's groups that needed support." Why? Those women completing the advanced literacy course are functional in terms of literacy and the content they learn encourages them to put these new ideas into practice. Through the group fund, over two years the understanding between the members grows. What they learn motivates them to be in a group and continue working together.

In addition, there is extreme importance in the companionship and camaraderie the women find through these groups and activities. The daily routine before the women of Bichueri formed a group together entailed: early food preparation for the husband and children, working in the field and gathering grass for the animals and for fuel, returning to cook lunch. Then, back to the field for plantation work and finally, cooking and feeding the family once again in the evening, doing more of the household chores before retiring to begin the whole cycle again. The women did all of this alone and fairly isolated from others in the community. Now that they're in a group, they don't feel alone and support each other. They also share their group work and it takes less time.

Almost invariably the women in each literacy class form a group eager for recognition. Once formed they require follow-up, and can entail technical assistance, training and other support. To respond to the challenge of supporting these groups, SC has hired on Women's Development (WD) staff in increasing numbers as the number of groups increases rapidly: from 85 in March 1992 to 101 by August of the same year.

Impact of collective work

In Ilaka 1, one of the four involved areas of Gorkha District, 48 women's groups have been formed through the NFE program. Among these are the women of Bichueri whose first activity as a group was forest conservation and plantation. Then they began individual vegetable gardens, followed by goat farming in a group and most recently chicken farming. With each advance, they have increased food available and income, when they sell their products. This past season, each of the women earned 80 Nepalese Rupees profit.

Here, the group's fund is increasing as they diversify their activities. However, the women have not yet chosen to take out individual loans from this fund. Thus, while the capital and capacity are present, the motivation and willingness to take the risk is not yet developed. There is a security benefit from the existence of the fund and the women seem satisfied with it for the moment.

A women's group in Garadani that finished literacy classes over a year ago explains that before participating in the course,

> they worked in the field, cooked and fed their children and did the daily work of the house. They didn't know the importance of education and sending the children to school. They didn't know they could go to the bazaar for marketing and they spent the whole day in the field.
>
> They didn't know love and how to care for their children. They were in the field early and didn't see their children. They came back late at might and didn't see them in the evening either. They only thought about how to get enough food. They didn't know anything about outside their village.

The women's increased abilities and activities, has a broader effect upon the community in that there is a changing perception of women's roles as they increasingly manage stores, plant trees, earn income, build home-improving structures, actively partake in community politics, and become the source of important health knowledge.

Altered social roles and community reaction

In various villages, women participants are experiencing a change in the social roles and capacities as a result of group education and action. In some locales, community members agree with the women and the work they are doing, and feel the work is good for the future. In Phinam village, the women solicit the support and participation of the community in their various projects. As the community participates in the women's group efforts, the women in turn help in other community projects.

"Without the community," they explain, "we couldn't do anything!" As with vegetable planting, the community saw that it was good for their earnings and status and gave more and more suggestions and offered support and help. There are "too many problems for the women to do everything themselves."

As with building a house, they need holes for the pillars, roofs and wood and they can't do such work without the community people, and in this example without the men. "They help us and we help them in return." In this tight and cooperative group, they explain that when the community comes to mobilize them, they'll find a replacement to help out if they don't have time. One woman tells that she was replaced by her mother-in-law, another by her brother-in-law; a third sent her father-in-law.

In the low caste community of Raniswara, the women proudly tell that "they lead the community." It is a new position and situation for them, uncommon in their community, but they like it. Their husbands approve and help them with the new work. They support their projects and say, "You are ahead of us, we walk behind."

In other areas, however, support is "in words only," or husbands and families "don't see the importance of their participation and need convincing." In Bichueri, increased participation in the community has created a management problem with the forest conservation project. As SC decreases its central role in the project, community responsibility increases and the whole community is currently participating under the jurisdiction of the women's group.

The men do not like this and their attitude and actions are the source of management difficulties as they resist further participation. Thus, the community is discussing the need to "punish" them in some way in order to convince them to participate as others do.

Other effects of the women's participation and new-found abilities have been a source of change bringing some tension into community and family relationships. There are reports of women organizing in numbers much greater than those in their single groups to demand more education and education about their rights and the rights of their children. They have even demonstrated against the men's drinking, gambling and "wasting time".

On the International Day of the Woman in 1992, there was a rally in the Ilaka 4 of Gorkha District in which three or four groups converged on a local liquor store and in Siraha, others held a rally supporting increased education for girls. Some of these groups even enforce a 5 Rupee fine on husbands each time they come home drunk after 6 p.m.

The social and family roles of these women in rural Nepal have been altered as they have gained literacy skills, created systems of group support for production and changed and enhanced their capacity in problem solving and organization for improvement in their individual and community environments.

Continued collective action

Literacy and group work

Many women who have finished the literacy course express interest in studying again. They'd like to learn more about productive activities like the ones they've already learned. making material out of cotton and knitting are of particular interest. They are ready to do more activities, and want to improve their economic status through understanding the detail of the subject.

For example, they'd like to learn about how cloth is made and from what etc., just as they learned about the nursery and plantation. Also, they say they want to learn "more about increasing income itself, not just about various activities" that achieve that effect. One group is also interested in organizing the community for a village rice mill project if possible, as they cannot do this on their own. For this, the community people must agree to help. They must solve this problem together.

And in Bichueri, a group wants to study accounts keeping and budgeting to better manage the (group) budget, as well as health advice and healthy eating habits for them and their families, and information on jobs - qualifications for specific positions and how to apply.

Program expansion: child care

Along with these production-oriented priorities, several of the women's groups have noted and discussed how their child care responsibilities limit the extent to which they can capitalize upon their gains and further enhance their progress. In Takukot, an isolated area of Gorkha, the women's participation in NFE brought the issue to light as the children would sit in the corners of literacy classes and group meetings.

Women's Development staff in Gorkha saw this happening and explained the idea of home-based rotating day care: a group of mothers, in this case seven mothers get together to form a system of child care in which one day per week each stays in from the fields and takes care of the seven children. SC staff used the established program of home-based child care supported by Redd Barna in a neighboring district as an illustration. The women in Takukot talked about it and were interested. They visited the Redd Barna sites and started the activities themselves.

As of August 1992, two women's groups had begun to address their need for child care by organizing among themselves, taking turns caring for the children each day, rotating through the week. This occurs either in the women's homes or in a makeshift center and is supported by ongoing trainings for the mothers. These cover child development issues such as learning through play, the development of simple, cheap and available educational materials and improvements to the physical environment and diet for better child health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation.

Likewise in Chhap Guan, the women came to the NFE class with their children who slept or played together in the corner. Sometimes they disturbed the study. Through informal discussions, the women in the group expressed that there was no other solution that they saw. "We must bring them".

These staff and many of the women's groups are pursuing further discussion of the need and various possible solutions. In one area, the constraints of child care responsibilities arose in a discussion of one of the literacy lessons. One primer lesson suggested that the women could save making a separate trip out of the home to gather wood or other materials they needed if they gathered it on their way home from working in the field. The women revealed that this was impossible because they had to carry the children. They might do this only if they had an opportunity to leave the children at home.

Their child care responsibilities limit both their ability to take further advantage of community development programs and their opportunities for personal development. Child care would increase freedom to come to classes and opportunity to carry things home from the field. Many local women's groups are considering the idea of home-based rotating child care among other options and its adaptation appropriate to their own situations.

ECD programs in Nepal

A recent UNICEF report observes that young children may attend school with their older siblings and while they are seated in a separate "infant class," they are taught the Grade 1 curriculum. The large number of these children (5% of total enrollment in 1988) reflects the need for a child care system in Nepalese communities.

There is a system of day care centers supported by the government wherein food is free, parents drop their children off and pay nothing. This system supports parents' expectation of day care centers as a service provided to them. For their children to attend school, the parents must purchase books and pay for the food children need during the day. Therefore, of the two services, they prefer the day care centers.

This government project is carried out by the Women's Development Department in conjunction with UNICEF and includes the provision of kits and play materials. There are two such centers Ilaka 1 of Gorkha and the government has promised a third center. While this project and its centers are spread throughout the country, in a few sites per district, it is recognized as being neither sustainable nor community owned as the centers are dependent upon external funding (see Landers and Leonard).

SC has had previous experience in child care programming in Nepal in this "provision-centered" vein. In Deurali during the early eighties, it supported a child care program which consisted of six centers by constructing the buildings, hiring teachers and paying their salaries, and distributing milk and play materials.

In terms of sustainability and replication, The program was unsuccessful. The villagers' expectations were too high and they expected continuation of "give aways." They couldn't be motivated to bring rice or other inputs, and thus the program did not establish community program ownership or responsibility.

This time around, SC is building upon the needs that the women have recognized and prioritized themselves. The women's groups will be supported in establishing community-owned systems for child care provision. In so doing, they will also enhance their own and community awareness about child development and meeting children's needs with limited resources.

A strong beginning

Home-based rotating child care in Chhap Guan

In Chhap Guan, a group of six women (1 grandmother and 5 mothers) who completed the literacy course have set up a system of rotating child care based on this model. They started in March 1992 and in May they requested SC support.

Seto Gurans, a Nepalese NGO concerned with ECD, conducted a training workshop with the women from this and a few observers from a neighboring village. The workshop covered how to make educational toys for the children from locally available materials as well as their proper use in the child care program. This included discussion and training on the cognitive, physical, social, emotional and language development of children under five.

The materials in Chhap Guan's makeshift child care center are simple and fun. Bamboo stacks, smaller bamboo pieces painted and stacked on sticks together by color, dolls, cushions and bean bags in various shapes, sizes and colors for throwing. The "center" itself is one third stone wall, one third leaves woven between bamboo shoots and one third open.

Two hammocks hang from the center ceiling. One woman used a stick to prop one hammock open, while the other remained tightly shut. The women swing the children in these hammocks to rock them to sleep or put the babies there after they have fallen asleep.

The children, who range in age from 0 to 2, are familiar with the toys and play catch and explore things freely. The women tell that dolls are the most popular materials with the children and they as caregivers preferred the dolls as well because the children would often entertain and play amongst themselves and were easier to handle.

The fathers of these children are absent or almost always occupied. When they have free time, they come around, but in this village, many of them are in India working. The grandparents are often around, but teenagers never. The younger sons and daughters of the six mothers in this group hang around the center and help when they don't have school and it's their mother's turn to watch the children.

The women meet regularly to let the other mothers know what their child is and is not eating and to suggest other foods to try. They also tell them if the child is sick and suggest they stay home to keep a close watch and not bring them to the center. The project is still "very experimental", they explain, and they don't know what works best yet.

Currently, the women feel a need to improve the care with some health training, including nutrition and how to better care for the child - its needs and how to meet them. They haven't yet tried all that they learned in the above-mentioned training in May 1992.

Since August 1992, this group of women has requested and received further support for a nutrition training and a health and sanitation training to enhance the quality of their ECD activities. The women note that the literacy content is very practical and they want such classes to continue with content more focused upon child development issues as they believe that type of idea and presentation and discussion can help their project.

Benefits to the women and children

The biggest benefit these women have experienced from establishing this system is that they are free from worry about their child at home. They don't need to think constantly about when they need to return home from the field to tend to their children's needs and to feed them.

They used to leave in the morning and come back after a few hours and then return to the field. They'd leave the children in hanging hammocks and guess from afar when they'd be awake and hungry and need their mother's attention. Now they can go further and stay the whole day and be assured that someone is taking care of their child.

In addition, they don't have to pay someone else to work in their field during the time they must be away and so needn't exchange money for labor at all any more. They can work

full time six days a week and can go further away to work in the fields, increasing their options and income generating opportunity.

Their children have access to more and more educational play things, and are beginning to experience higher quality stimulation and interaction with their parents during child care as well as in the home from the earliest years. In addition, they are benefiting from their parents' increased knowledge about their developmental needs, and the importance of hygiene and sanitation in caring for them.

Growing community interest

The neighboring villages are taking note, talking about the emerging child care solution these women are working with and are asking for all kinds of information on who supports it, how and to what extent. In Garadani, mothers in the group with young children are thinking of home-based system and want to know what SC can provide. Observers from Bhusal Guan attended the May training in Chhap Guan and are interested in starting up a similar program.

In Bichueri, the women think the home-based rotating system is a good idea, but want to think about building a center and hiring a teacher instead. As this is the area in which SC tried and failed in its first child care attempt, the field coordinators do not want to raise any community expectations of service delivery or hopes of and child care model liable to have high recurrent costs. The communities must realize their own needs and meet them. Many women's groups are proceeding slowly in their discussions of ECD activities and options.

Further program directions

The NFE and WD staff are currently working on strengthening several aspects of the program. Integration of program elements is one key aspect of building upon the strong base to meet community priorities in education and children's needs. A project being carried out in concert with UNESCO will produce a baby book that combines to meet both post-literacy and early childhood development information needs. It will also create a record of the child's health and development and raise parental awareness about children's healthy development.

In the spring of 1993, an ethnographic study of childrearing practices and parent-child interaction was undertaken to further inform programmatic options. This information will be used primarily in development of the baby book and associated lessons on child development, but will also provide a valuable description of parent practices for future evaluation and comparison.

The WD Officer points out that the impact of these new materials may also create an overwhelming demand for ECD once such awareness is raised. This will come via ECD literacy content additions to the curriculum, the baby book and a flip chart upon which she is currently working.

As mentioned, this is precisely what happened with women's group formation, as dozens of groups formed through the literacy activities, forcing SC to hire WD field staff specifically for work with these many groups. As NFE made people more sensitive to education, especially for girls, this effect could be similar with ECD, as participants will be more sensitive to ECD.

The ECD components of the larger NFE and Women's Development projects are funded now with available grant money or with private contributions to SC, as is possible. The cost of the program thus far has been minimal. The training that was given in Chhap Guan for materials and their use cost $500 and a later, one-day nutrition training was only $25 since SC has trained local health staff who are able to lead such sessions.

A grant for specific support to ECD with some attention to maintaining the strong NFE/WD base is currently being sought. These monies would support further development of ECD program aspects and their expansion into more villages within the existing NFE/WD impact areas as well as incorporation of ECD work in new areas of the country in which SC is beginning program work. But the extent of community and specifically women's groups'

demand for the project described above could see these activities mushroom without a grant and without specific attention to program expansion. Without further financial input, SC could support these communities only on a very small scale.

Conclusion

SC's approach to NFE has been to energize the process of becoming literate with useful daily information relevant to the needy communities of Gorkha and Siraha. Its success has been the basis for a network of women's groups which continue production and other activities to the benefit of themselves, their families and their communities. Now the program has spawned a variety of activities focusing more specifically on the needs of children and has formed a vital program within "Strong Beginnings," SC's international early childhood development initiative.

Lessons and program principles

Nationally relevant and prominent in literacy and community development, SC's NFE and WD programs demonstrate valuable lessons for approaches to non-formal education both for Nepal and a larger education and development audience:

- Make curriculum relevant to the lives of the learners, otherwise you will not get their attention and time;
- Require community initiative via participation in management, planning, fees, etc., as appropriate to ensure program ownership and commitment sustainability;
- Locate facility, teaching and supervisory capacity close to the community;
- Integrate the program approach and goals across sectors - health, education, agriculture and natural resource management - to address a community's many needs and interests most cost effectively;
- Be prepared to meet demand for further support aroused by raising awareness and empowering people to meet their own needs.
- Expect that by empowering women, issues of child care responsibilities and supporting healthy child development will come to the forefront.

These six lessons have been learned in working over the long term with community groups. They shape SC's approach to non-formal education and have both produced a sizable and expanding WD program and sown the seed for an ECD program.The community interest, needs and demand for ECD programs forms a new focus for continuing work in Gorkha and other districts and defines the next challenge for SC's ongoing learning and partnership with communities.

The successes and failures of SC and its partner organizations inform new directions in Gorkha and beyond and upgrade expansion into new areas of non-formal educational intervention. Thus, the lessons and program principles documented thus far in this program continue to improve upon the original work as well as enhance the possibilities for success in new work undertaken in more isolated areas and in new issue areas such as early childhood development and AIDS education.

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World Education, with the Government of Nepal national literacy program developed a strategy for linking literacy training to development which includes a series of learning materials that cover a broad range of development issues, a set of learning activities and training methods characterized by participatory learning, and a process of individual and collective growth that make literacy an appropriate starting point for self-help community development.

World Education Report 1991. UNESCO, Paris, 1991.